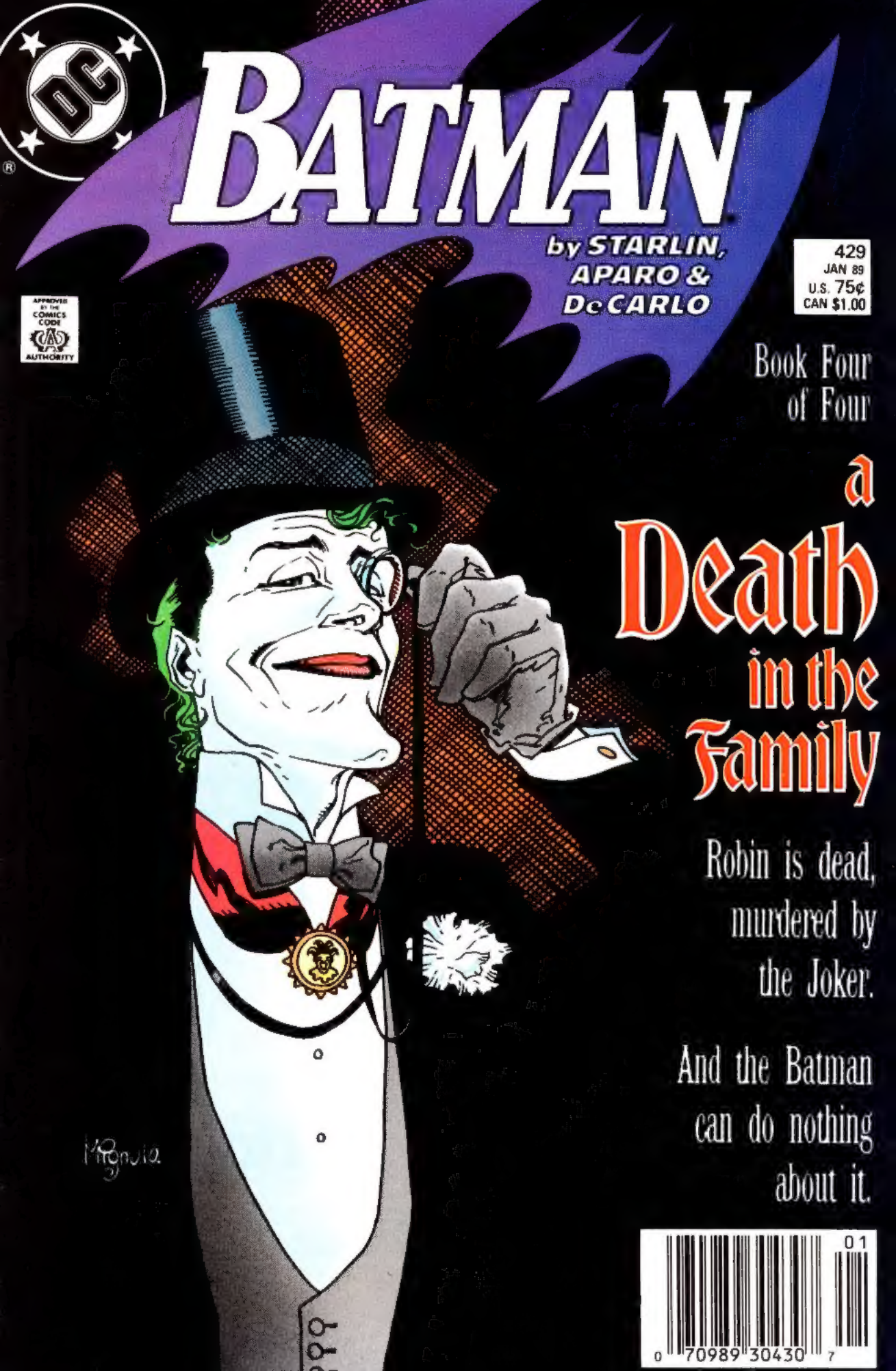
BATMAN
by STARLIN, APARO & DeCARLO
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APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
Book Four of Four
a Death in the Family
Robin is dead, murdered by the Joker.
And the Batman can do nothing about it.
0 70989 30430 7 01

A DEATH IN THE FAMILY!

CHAPTER 6
HIS NAME'S RALPH BUNDY, A CIA AGENT. THE PRESIDENT SENT HIM TO TALK TO ME. I ALREADY KNOW WHAT HE'S GOING TO SAY, BUT I LISTEN ANYWAY.
IT'S LIKE THIS, BATMAN.
YOU TAKE OUT THE JOKER AND IT'S GOING TO CAUSE A MAJOR INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT.
THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S CURRENTLY IN THE MIDDLE OF SOME VERY DELICATE NEGOTIATIONS WITH IRAN.
ANOTHER ARMS FOR HOSTAGES DEAL?

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BOB KANE • CREATOR

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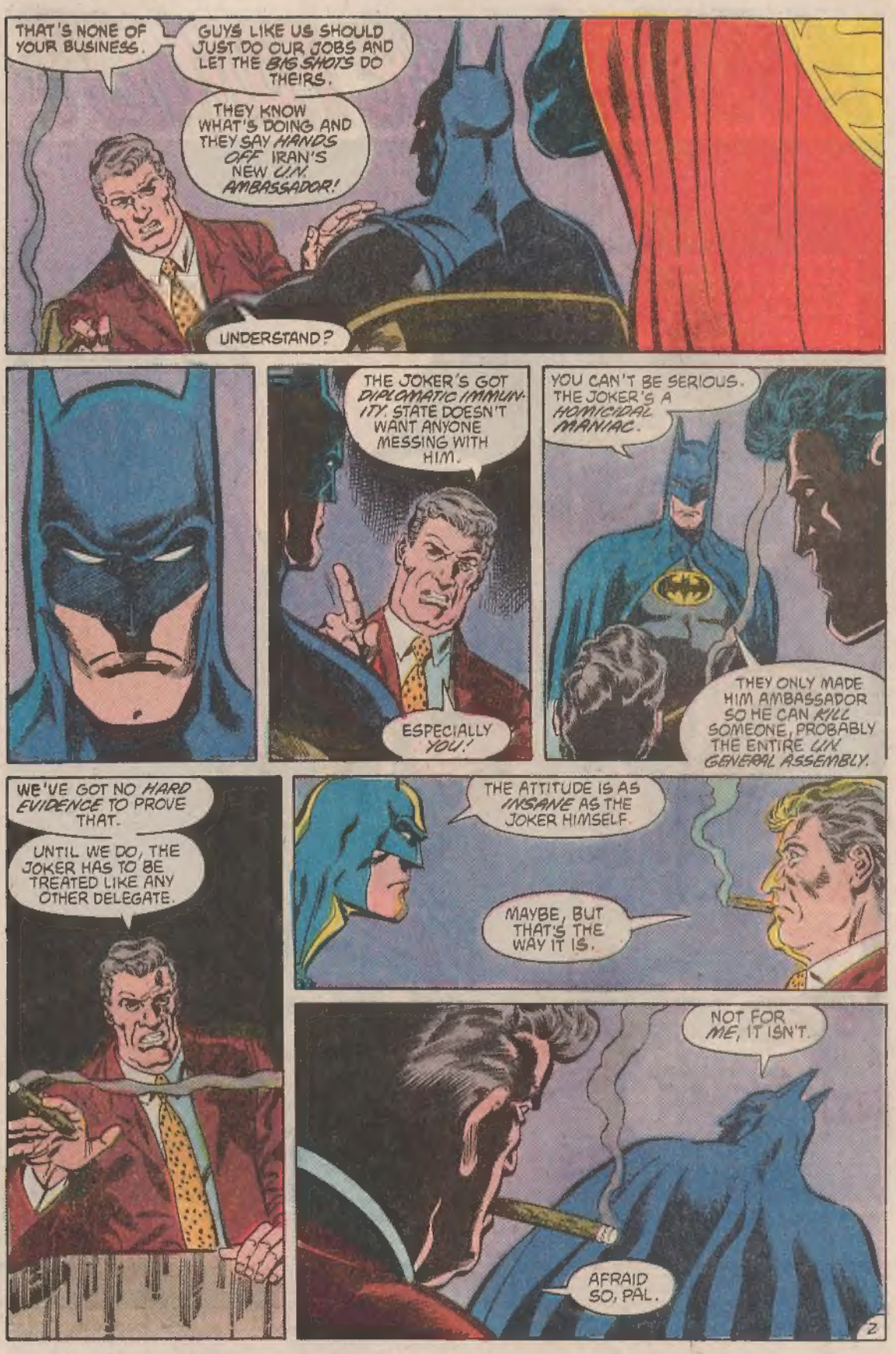
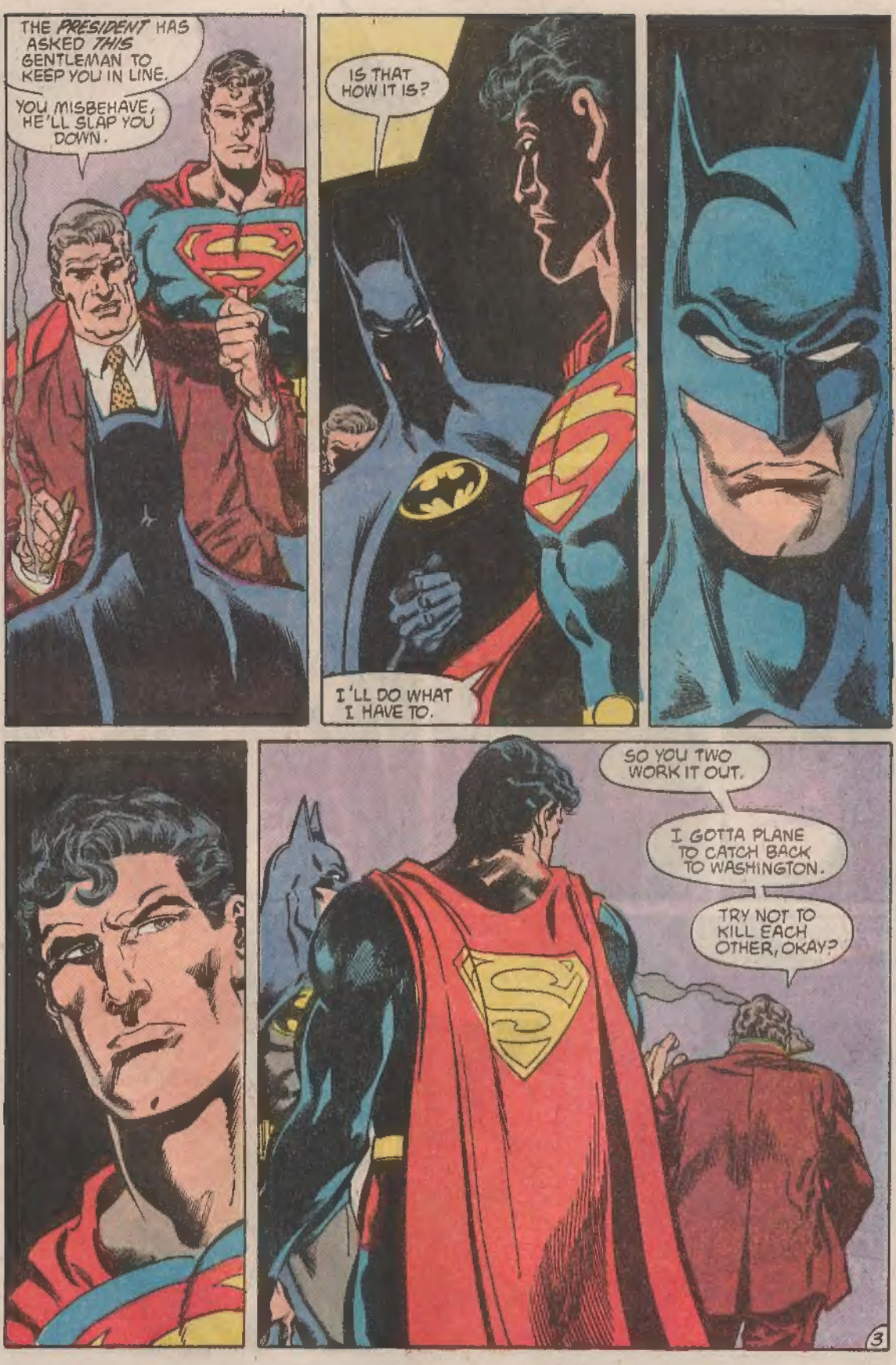

THAT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS.
GUYS LIKE US SHOULD JUST DO OUR JOBS AND LET THE BIG SHOTS DO THEIRS.
THEY KNOW WHAT'S DOING AND THEY SAY HANDS OFF IRAN'S NEW U.N. AMBASSADOR!
UNDERSTAND?
THE JOKER'S GOT DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY. STATE DOESN'T WANT ANYONE MESSING WITH HIM.
ESPECIALLY YOU!
YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS. THE JOKER'S A HOMICIDAL MANIAC.
THEY ONLY MADE HIM AMBASSADOR SO HE CAN KILL SOMEONE, PROBABLY THE ENTIRE U.N. GENERAL ASSEMBLY.
WE'VE GOT NO HARD EVIDENCE TO PROVE THAT.
UNTIL WE DO, THE JOKER HAS TO BE TREATED LIKE ANY OTHER DELEGATE.
THE ATTITUDE IS AS INSANE AS THE JOKER HIMSELF.
MAYBE, BUT THAT'S THE WAY IT IS.
NOT FOR ME, IT ISN'T.
AFRAID SO, PAL.
2

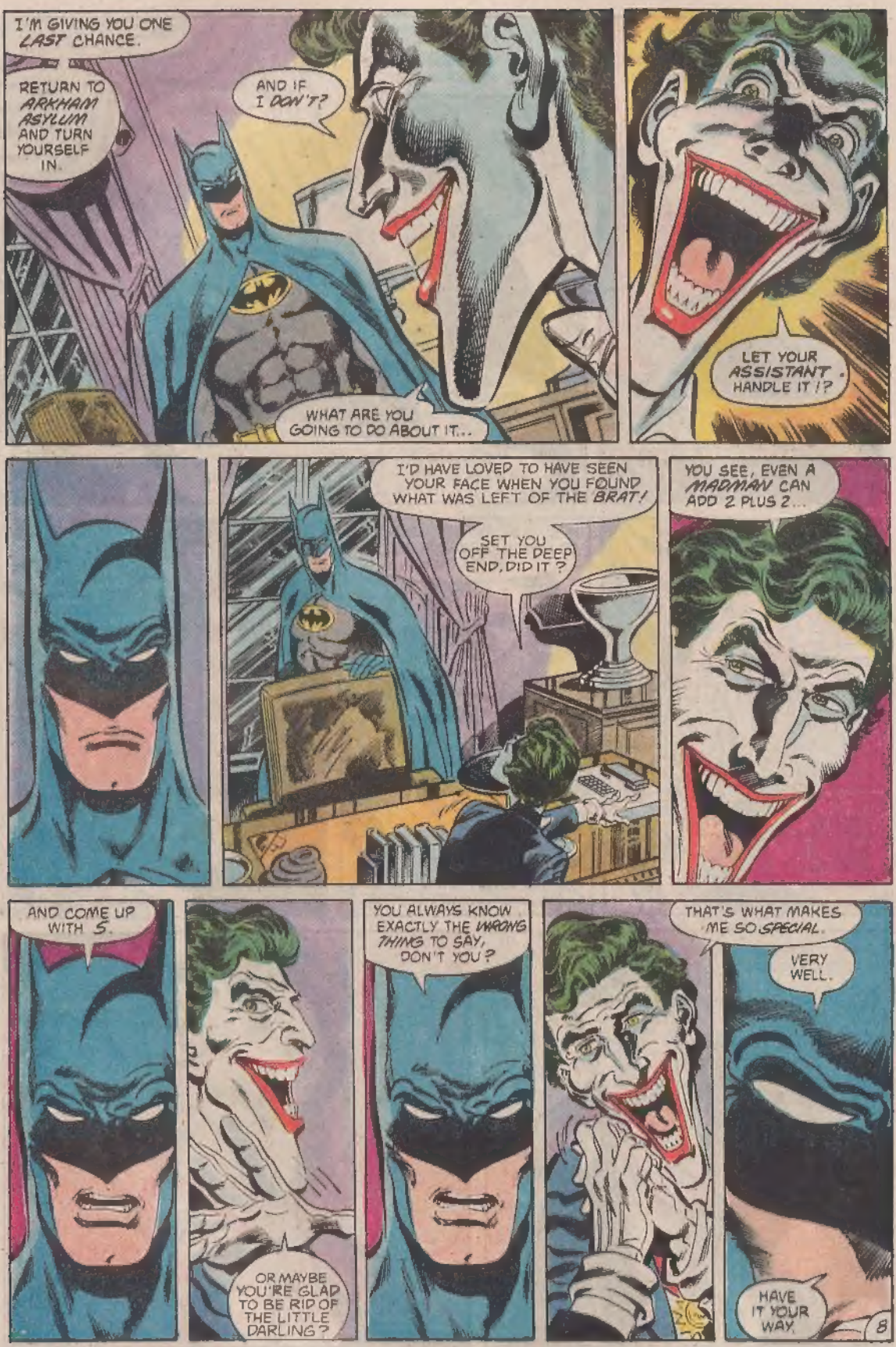

THE PRESIDENT HAS ASKED THIS GENTLEMAN TO KEEP YOU IN LINE.
YOU MISBEHAVE, HE'LL SLAP YOU DOWN.
IS THAT HOW IT IS?
I'LL DO WHAT I HAVE TO.
SO YOU TWO WORK IT OUT.
I GOTTA PLANE TO CATCH BACK TO WASHINGTON.
TRY NOT TO KILL EACH OTHER, OKAY?
3

BATMAN...
BRUCE...
I READ ON THE TELEX ABOUT YOUR WARD, JASON TODD, BEING KILLED IN AN ETHIOPIAN WAREHOUSE FIRE.
WAS HE ROBIN?
YES.
I'M SORRY TO HEAR THAT.
HE SEEMED LIKE A REALLY NICE KID.
HE WAS.
JASON WAS THE BEST.
THE JOKER MURDERED HIM.
YOU HAVE PROOF?
A DEATH BED STATEMENT BY HIS MOTHER. GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME IF NOT A COURT OF LAW.
BUT THE JOKER'S IMMUNIZED FROM RETRIBUTION FOR THAT AND ANY OTHER CRIME THAT HE'S EVER COMMITTED.
THAT'S THE LAW, NOT JUSTICE.
DON'T DO ANYTHING STUPID, BRUCE.
4

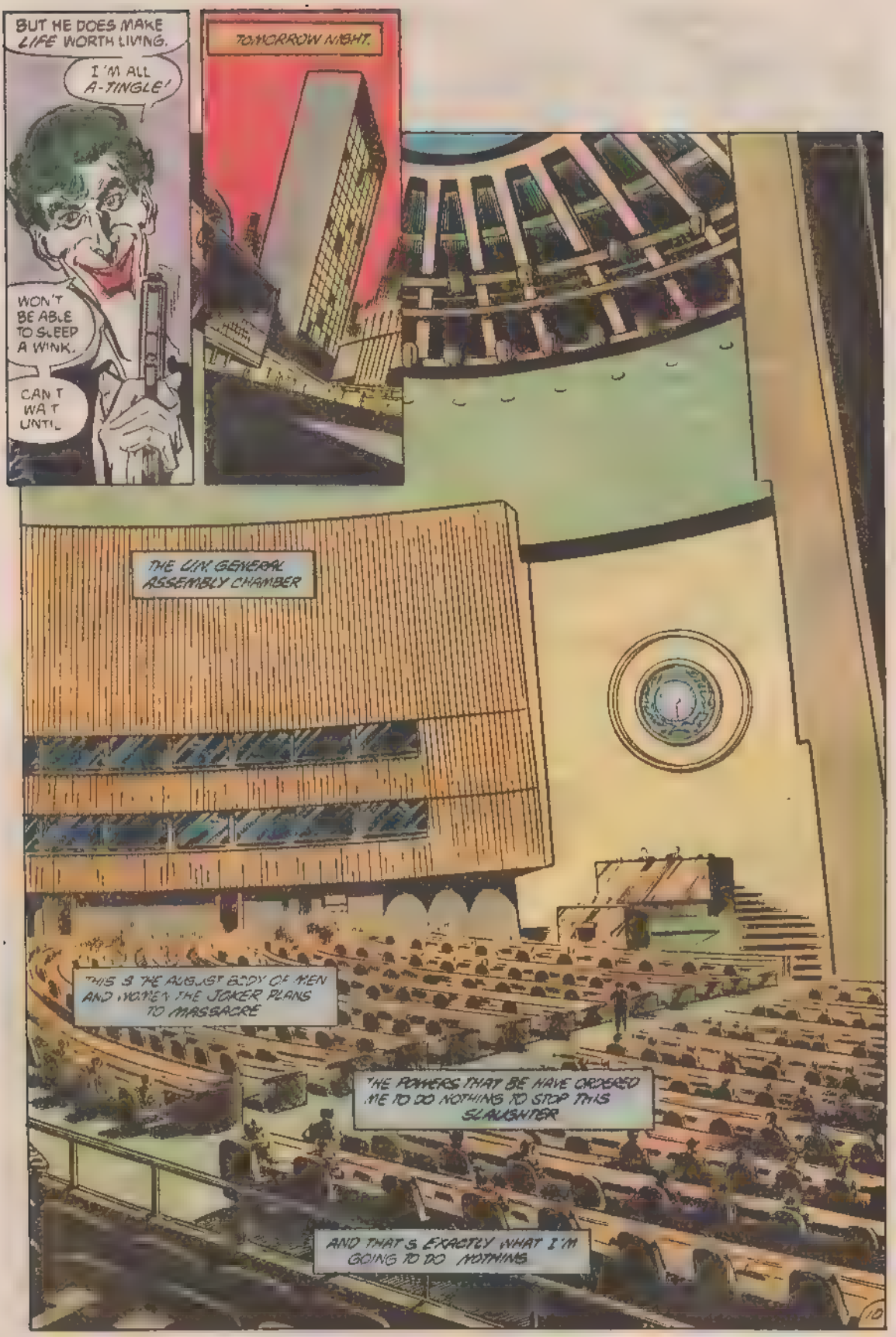
YOU CAN'T PUT YOUR THIRST FOR VENGEANCE ABOVE YOUR COUNTRY'S BEST INTERESTS.
SPARE ME YOUR BOY SCOUT SENTIMENTALITIES, KENT.
TO USE YOUR OWN WORDS... I'LL DO WHAT I HAVE TO.
MAYBE, WITH A LITTLE LUCK, WE'LL NOT FIND OURSELVES AT CROSS PURPOSES.
I WONDER WHY I ALWAYS HAVE THE FEELING HE KNOWS SOMETHING I DON'T?
BACK IN MY HOTEL ROOM, I SEE WHAT MY FEDERAL CONTACTS CAN DO ABOUT GETTING ME INTO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AS BRUCE WAYNE.
MY REPUTATION AS A PLAYBOY DILETTANTE KEEPS ME FROM OBTAINING A POSITION AS A DELEGATE.
BUT THEY MANAGE TO SQUEEZE ME IN AS AN UNOFFICIAL OBSERVER.
NOW I CAN KEEP AN EYE ON THE JOKER WITHOUT MAKING THE STATE DEPARTMENT NERVOUS.
THE FOOLS.
5

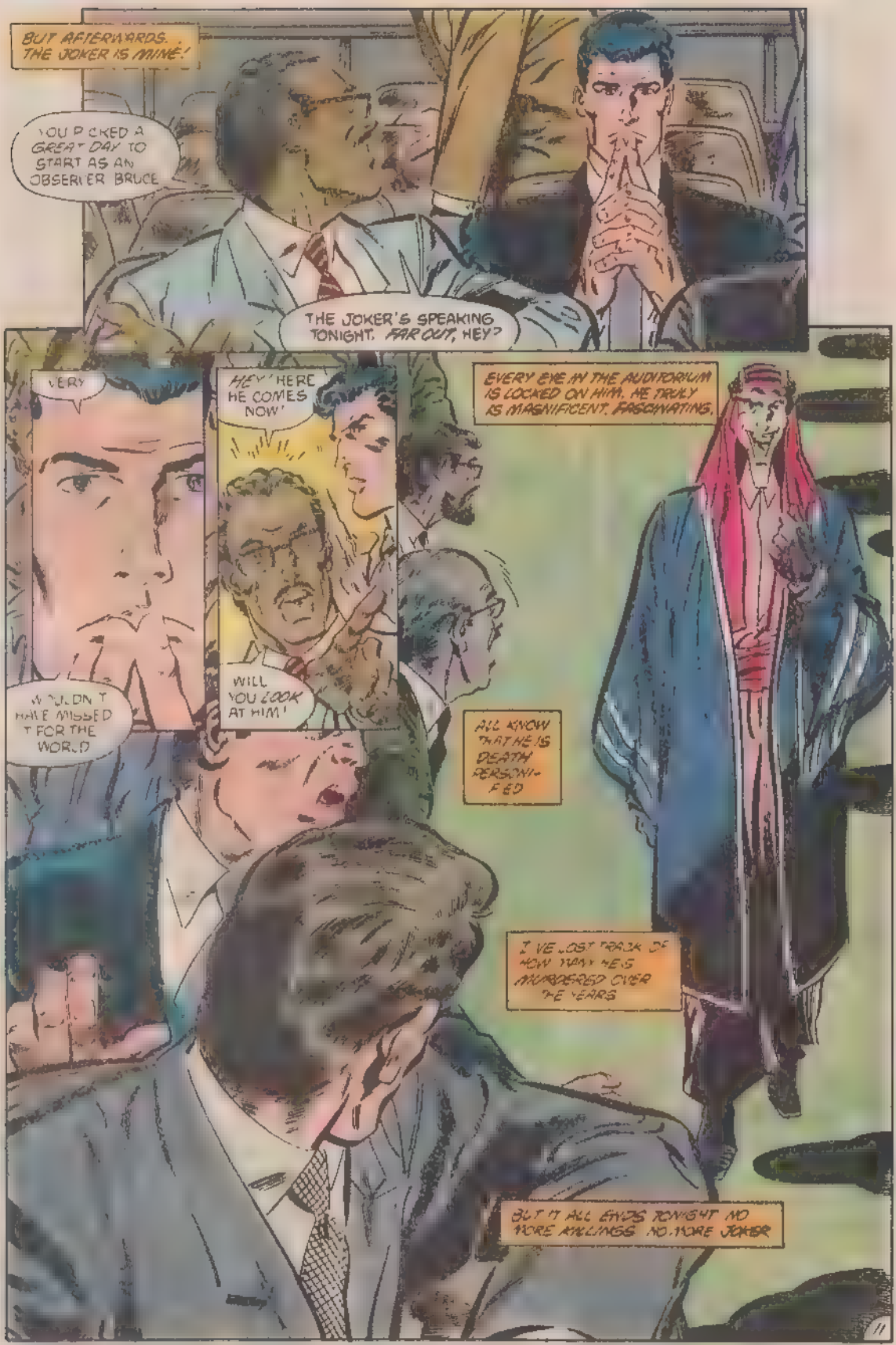
LOOKS LIKE THIS IS IT.
THE FINAL SHOWDOWN BETWEEN THE JOKER AND MYSELF.
GUESS I ALWAYS KNEW IT WOULD SOMEDAY COME TO THIS.
ONE OF US IS GOING TO DIE. BUT IS THAT REALLY WHAT I WANT TO SEE HAPPEN?
THE MAN'S HOPELESSLY INSANE. HOW CAN I HOLD HIM RESPONSIBLE EVEN FOR WHAT HAPPENED TO JASON?
OR AM I JUST LOOKING FOR A COP OUT?
ADMIT IT, WAYNE. THE JOKER'S COME CLOSE TO FINISHING YOU OFF DOZENS OF TIMES. TOO CLOSE.
YOU'RE STILL NOT BACK TO TOTAL EFFICIENCY AFTER THAT ENCOUNTER YOU HAD WITH DEACON BLACKFIRE.
YOU'RE TOO EMOTIONALLY INVOLVED -- NOT THINKING STRAIGHT.
MAYBE IT'D BE BEST TO LET SUPERMAN HANDLE THIS?
THAT WAY YOU WON'T DO SOMETHING YOU'LL REGRET FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.
BUT HE MURDERED JASON.
6

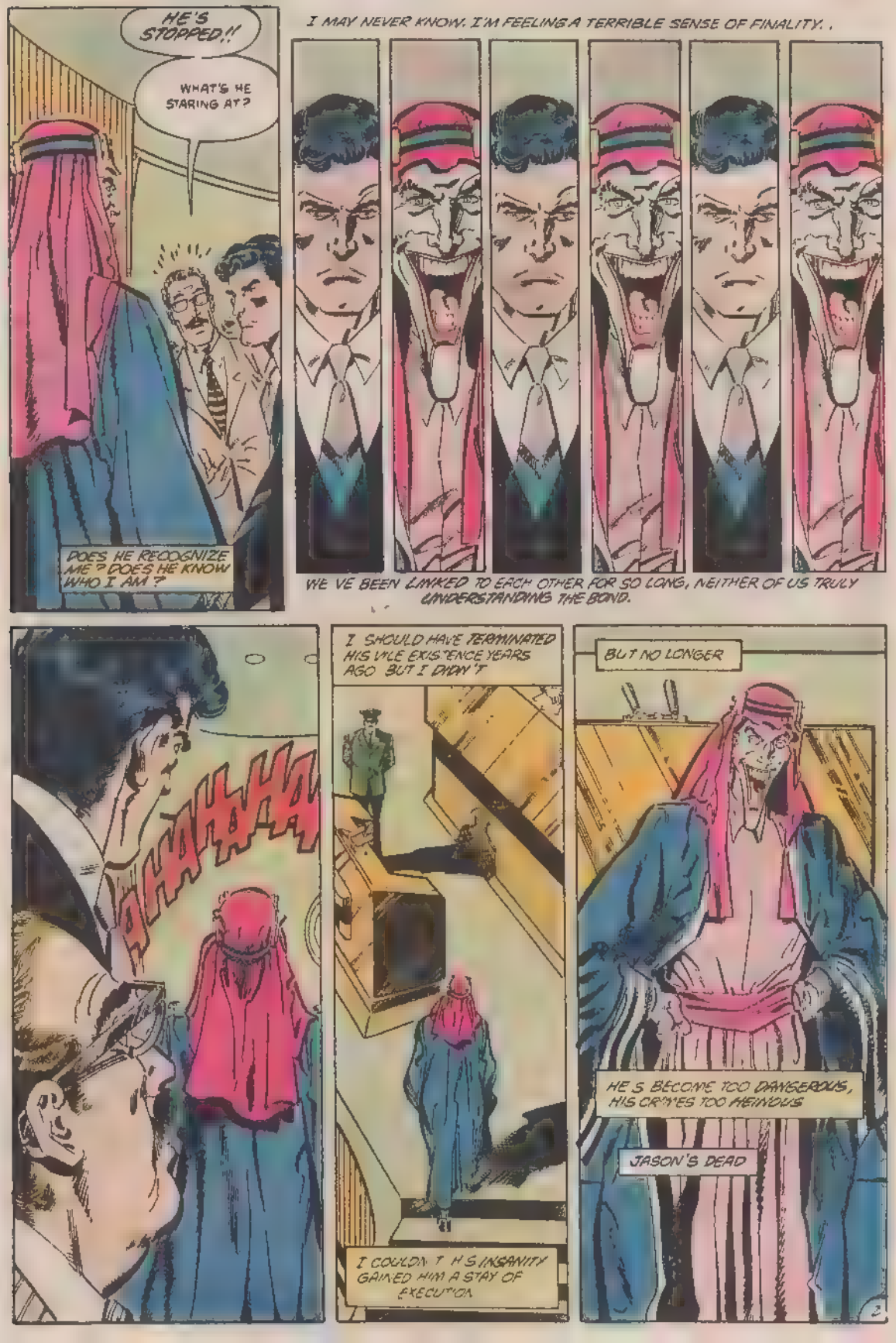
THE LIGHTS ARE STILL BURNING IN THE WINDOWS OF THE IRANIAN MISSION TO THE UN.
I'M SURE THE AMBASSADOR IS UP. HE'S RUMORED TO BE AN INSOMNIAC.
EVERYTHING IS ARRANGED FOR YOU TO SPEAK BEFORE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TOMORROW NIGHT, SIR. WE'RE READY ALSO.
TOMORROW NIGHT?
UN SECURITY INSISTED IT BE SO.
THEY FEAR YOU AND ARE LIMITING ACCESS TO YOUR SPEECH. NO ONE WILL BE ALLOWED IN THE GALLERY.
SMART MOVE ON THEIR PART-- NOT THAT IT'LL DO THEM MUCH GOOD.
TOO BAD ABOUT THERE BEING NO AUDIENCE THOUGH.
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN DELICIOUS TO HAVE A LARGE CROWD OF SPECTATORS.
I JUST LOVE LARGE DEAD CROWDS.
THAT WILL BE ALL FOR TONIGHT. SWEET DREAMS, AB'DUL.
YASSAR, SIR.
WHATEVER.
YES... LARGE DEAD CROWDS...
DON'T DO IT, JOKER!
7


I'M GIVING YOU ONE LAST CHANCE.
RETURN TO ARKHAM ASYLUM AND TURN YOURSELF IN.
AND IF I DON'T?
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT...
LET YOUR ASSISTANT HANDLE IT!?
I'D HAVE LOVED TO HAVE SEEN YOUR FACE WHEN YOU FOUND WHAT WAS LEFT OF THE BRAT!
SET YOU OFF THE DEEP END, DID IT?
YOU SEE, EVEN A MADMAN CAN ADD 2 PLUS 2...
AND COME UP WITH 5.
OR MAYBE YOU'RE GLAD TO BE RID OF THE LITTLE DARLING?
YOU ALWAYS KNOW EXACTLY THE WRONG THING TO SAY, DON'T YOU?
THAT'S WHAT MAKES ME SO SPECIAL.
VERY WELL.
HAVE IT YOUR WAY.
8

I'LL BE SEEING YOU AROUND.
BY THE WAY, THANKS.
HUH?
THANKS?!
THANKS FOR WHAT?
UP UNTIL NOW I WASN'T ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN THAT YOU WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HAPPENED TO JASON.
YOUR CONFIRMING IT MAKES WHAT I HAVE TO DO A LOT EASIER.
SO THAT'S HOW IT'S GOING TO BE, HEY?
WANT TO PLAY TOUGH, DO WE?
OKAY, LET'S MAMBO!!
GONE!
I HATE IT WHEN HE DOES THAT.
9

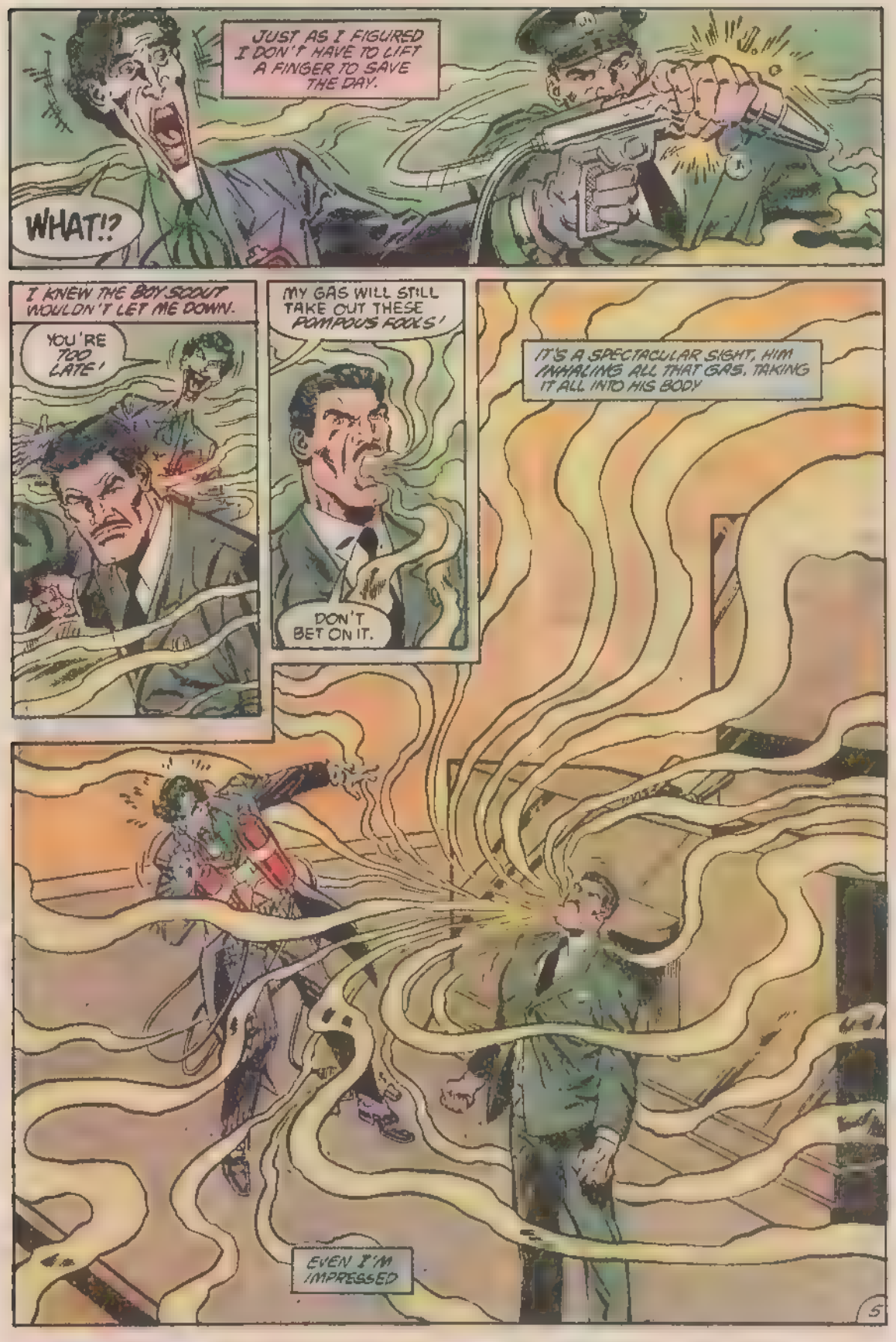

BUT HE DOES MAKE LIFE WORTH LIVING.
I'M ALL A-TINGLE!
WON'T BE ABLE TO SLEEP A WINK.
CAN'T WAIT UNTIL
TOMORROW NIGHT.
THE U.N. GENERAL ASSEMBLY CHAMBER
THIS IS THE AUGUST BODY OF MEN AND WOMEN THE JOKER PLANS TO MASSACRE
THE POWERS THAT BE HAVE ORDERED ME TO DO NOTHING TO STOP THIS SLAUGHTER
AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I'M GOING TO DO NOTHING
10


BUT AFTERWARDS... THE JOKER IS MINE!
YOU PICKED A GREAT DAY TO START AS AN OBSERVER BRUCE
THE JOKER'S SPEAKING TONIGHT. FAR OUT, HEY?
VERY
HEY! HERE HE COMES NOW!
WILL YOU LOOK AT HIM!
WOULDN'T HAVE MISSED IT FOR THE WORLD
EVERY EYE IN THE AUDITORIUM IS LOCKED ON HIM. HE TRULY IS MAGNIFICENT. FASCINATING.
ALL KNOW THAT HE IS DEATH PERSONIFIED
I'VE LOST TRACK OF HOW MANY HE'S MURDERED OVER THE YEARS
BUT IT ALL ENDS TONIGHT NO MORE KILLINGS NO MORE JOKER


HE'S STOPPED!!
WHAT'S HE STARING AT?
DOES HE RECOGNIZE ME? DOES HE KNOW WHO I AM?
I MAY NEVER KNOW. I'M FEELING A TERRIBLE SENSE OF FINALITY. .
WE'VE BEEN LINKED TO EACH OTHER FOR SO LONG, NEITHER OF US TRULY UNDERSTANDING THE BOND.
AHHHHH
I SHOULD HAVE TERMINATED HIS VILE EXISTENCE YEARS AGO BUT I DIDN'T
I COULDN'T. HIS INSANITY GAINED HIM A STAY OF EXECUTION
BUT NO LONGER
HE'S BECOME TOO DANGEROUS, HIS CRIMES TOO HEINOUS
JASON'S DEAD

IT IS A GREAT HONOR FOR ME TO BE HERE TONIGHT
I AM PROUD TO SPEAK FOR THE GREAT ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN.
THAT COUNTRY'S CURRENT LEADERS AND I HAVE A LOT IN COMMON
INSANITY AND A GREAT LOVE OF FISH
BUT UNFORTUNATELY, WE ALSO SHARE A MUTUAL PROBLEM
WE GET NO RESPECT.
EVERYONE THINKS OF IRAN AS THE HOME OF THE TERRORIST ZEALOT!
THEY SAY EVEN WORSE THINGS ABOUT ME, WOULD YOU BELIEVE?
WE'VE BOTH SUFFERED UNKIND ABUSE AND BELITTLEMENT!
WELL, WE AREN'T GOING TO TAKE IT ANYMORE!!
YOU'LL NO LONGER BE ALLOWED TO KICK US AROUND!
IN FACT, YOU AREN'T GOING TO BE ABLE TO KICK ANYONE AROUND EVER AGAIN!
3

SAY GOOD NIGHT, GRACIE!
THE SHEEP FINALLY REALIZE THEY'VE BEEN LED TO SLAUGHTER
HA HA HA HA HA
GAS
THE JOKER'S LETHAL LAUGHING GAS!


JUST AS I FIGURED I DON'T HAVE TO LIFT A FINGER TO SAVE THE DAY.
WHAT!?
I KNEW THE BOY SCOUT WOULDN'T LET ME DOWN.
YOU'RE TOO LATE!
MY GAS WILL STILL TAKE OUT THESE POMPOUS FOOLS!
DON'T BET ON IT.
IT'S A SPECTACULAR SIGHT, HIM INHALING ALL THAT GAS, TAKING IT ALL INTO HIS BODY
EVEN I'M IMPRESSED
5

SUPERHAM!
NO FAIR! YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO MEDDLE IN MY AFFAIRS!
UNFAIR!
UNFAIR!
UNFAIR!
BATMAN, HE'S ALL YOURS.
I'VE GOT TO FIND SOME SAFE PLACE TO GET RID OF THIS GAS.
FOUL!
I CALL A FOUL!
EVERYONE MUST BE PENALIZED FOR THIS CHEATING!
YOU'LL SEE THE JOKER IS NOT GOING TO TAKE THIS LYING DOWN!
NOT WHEN I HAVE PLAN-B TO FALL BACK ON!
KER-THOOM

THE JOKER OBVIOUSLY HAD HIS HENCHMAN PLANT THESE EXPLOSIVES EARLIER IN THE DAY
THE MONSTER ALWAYS HAS ANOTHER TRICK UP HIS SLEEVE ..
... ALWAYS ANOTHER DEADLY TRICK.
NOTHING LIKE A LITTLE DEATH, DESTRUCTION AND SMOKE TO MAKE AN EXIT ON!
NOT THIS TIME, JOKER!
GIVE IT UP!

I CAN'T!
I CAN'T!
I CAN'T!
HAVE A LITTLE GOING AWAY PRESENT, BATSY OL' BOY!
I MANAGE TO AVOID THE DEADLY FUSILLADE.
THE DELEGATE BEHIND ME IS NOT SO LUCKY.
ANOTHER INNOCENT SACRIFICE TO THE JOKER'S MANIA.
WHEREVER HE GOES... DEATH..
ANOTHER HAPLESS VICTIM TO HAUNT MY SLEEP.
LET THERE BE AN END TO IT!
NO MORE!
RUNNING WILL DO YOU NO GOOD, JOKER!
18

NO MATTER WHERE YOU FLEE...
...I WILL BE RIGHT BEHIND YOU!
MOVE IT!
GET US OUT OF HERE!
NO ESCAPE!!
YOU KILLED JASON...
JASON..
JASON.

NO!!!
BBBRRRRR!!
IT
T

THE PANICKED ARAB'S GUNFIRE IS INDISCRIMINATE, NOT CARING WHO IT STRIKES.
ONE SLUG TAKES OFF THE BACK OF THE PILOT'S HEAD.
THE GUNMAN IMMEDIATELY REALIZES HIS MISTAKE.
NOT QUITE THE WAY I IMAGINED THE SCENARIO ENDING.
I'LL BE LUCKY TO ESCAPE WITH MY LIFE.
FAREWELL, OLD FOE.
HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH...
21

KER-THAAMN
KAR-TOOOOOMM
FIND HIS BODY!
FIND HIS BODY!!
BUT I KNOW THEY WON'T.
THAT'S THE WAY THINGS ALWAYS END WITH THE JOKER AND ME.
UNRESOLVED.
END

BAT-SIGNALS

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L-3522

I'll make it quick. We received a huge number of responses to BATMAN #426-427. Volumes. There is no way I'll be able to run anything but the smallest fraction. I'm sorry about that, and there's nothing I could do, but I thought you should know anyway.

When appropriate, some of your letters have been shortened to save room.

Dear Dan and Denny,

It is the eve of an historic occasion in current BATMAN continuity. Tomorrow I plan to vote that Robin will survive the Joker's death trap. Not just because I can't live without the character ... I just can't stand watching an institution die in the midst of such a contrived story! Don't get me wrong! I am enjoying the "Death in the Family" storyline, and I think the reader participation angle is quite novel; however, I feel that Mr. Starlin could surely have come up with a more convincing scenario for the main purpose of this yarn: to let Jason Todd haters put their money where their mouths are! Mr. Starlin asks for an enormous amount of "suspension of disbelief" when he has the Joker and Robin both on quests to the Middle East. And not only that, but two of the three suspected long-lost-Jason-Mama's just happen to get caught up in the Joker's mischief ... one as a spy on his cruise missile sale to terrorists, the second as a blackmail victim. Moreover, that birth certificate with most of just the real mother's name blotted out, and the handy-dandy address book that lists three possible candidates (who all just happen to be overseas) were all too convenient, making this a very gimmicked mystery.

But I'm a child at heart, so I decided to ignore all that and enjoy the great dialogue, action, characterization, and artwork. Well done by all! Though I fully expect Robin to be killed off (just as I expect Bush to be the next President), I would like to see how Mr. Starlin planned on getting Robin out alive, just in case Robin fandom did rally against the Robin haters. Perhaps a special edition "what if" story would be in order, with Robin surviving ... or vice versa, as the case may be. The final tally will tell.

Duane Scott Hitchcock
11525-55 Caminito La Bar
San Diego, CA 92126

*****

Dear Sirs,

I am writing in regard to the "YOU WILL DECIDE" vote on the life or death of Jason Todd as Robin. After much consideration I will be calling in my vote to waste the little punk. But I thought I would write in to explain my decision.

I never did like Jason. The only Robin I knew was Dick Grayson. I always felt an identification with Robin. I was in my teens and in college when Robin was finally acknowledged as the "teen" wonder and began attending Hudson U. I followed his storylines closely. The growing rift between him and Batman and the inevitable split was one of the great ongoing storylines of comics history. But wait ... Batman needs a Robin ... What now?

Enter Jason Todd. The NEW Boy Wonder. What was so new about him? Jason was a re-hash of Dick Grayson. Even his origin (pre-crisis post-crisis mid-life-crisis) was similar to Dick's, only less exciting. You asked readers to accept a NEW Robin after all those years and there was nothing NEW about him. He was so similar to the first Robin that I think readers felt insulted.

Frank Miller's Robin worked because the idea of a girl Robin was so refreshingly new. Plus Carrie Kelly was her own character and in no way copied from Dick Grayson.

Jason didn't work from the beginning, so someone decided to "fix" his origin. Which sounded like a "fix," and made things confusing. Plus (something I found personally annoying), it didn't seem as though anyone had a grasp on how old Jason was. Sometimes he looked twelve. Other times he looked eighteen. Even his physical size varied from story to story.

I enjoyed Jason's outing with the Teen Titans. It was well written and the interaction with the original Titans was well done. I also liked Jason's one-time team-up with Nightwing ... it was a nice touch on the ongoing NEW Robin story. The part at the end where Nightwing offered to "listen" when no one else would, was great.

Finally, I voted to kill off Jason because ... Hey, this is only fiction. If something doesn't work, try something else. Nobody ever said Frank Miller's story was the Batman gospel. You can create another Robin whenever you want to. YES, BATMAN NEEDS A ROBIN. Maybe you could go back and write Batman stories when Dick first started? Or if you want to create a new Robin, GREAT! But make it original enough to avoid the Jason Syndrome.

Thank you for the chance to let the readers decide the direction of their own comics. It proves you folks really care about your audience.

Sincerely,
Steve Case
Address Withheld

*****

Dear Dark Knights,

I'm voting to have Robin survive, and I just wanted to explain why. I am not a huge Robin fan, and I'm really curious to see how you would handle his death. But I'd rather have that later, not now, for various reasons.

One, if you killed him, it would totally negate Miller's DARK KNIGHT. It was after that event that Batman hung up his cape. And you weren't planning on cancelling both his comics, were you? I like the idea that DARK KNIGHT may or may not actually happen. It leaves it up to the readers' imagination.

Two, besides losing Robin, I see us losing a great villain, too. I don't see anyone killing Robin without the Batman killing him in turn. He has his beliefs, but he's crossed the line on occasion. And if this wouldn't be the time for it, nothing would. He would have to kill, or permanently cripple the Joker.

Third, and finally, I think Jason still has potential as a character. The return(?) of his mother has brought up all sorts of possibilities. There are always possibilities. And I have to admit, deep down, that I like the rug-rat. There. I've said it. Besides, who was it that said, "Batman needs a Robin"?

Chris Connelly
7008 Appoline
Dearborn, MI 48126

*****

Dear Bat-Bookies,

These first two books of the "A Death in the Family" saga have been terrific, though I feel that less time could have been spent on the flashback, considering it had only been two weeks since the last issue. Another complaint is the "Let's Get Inside By Dressing Up Like Them" cliché.

The action was good, and the hand-to-hand combat between Bats and Shiva was terrific. It's nice to see a woman take on Bruce. Boy, am I glad she isn't Robin's mom.

The family reunion was heart-touching, though it must have hurt Jason to

learn that his father was a little bit of a rat, leaving the woman who bore his child. Then Jas finds out that his mom is a ratette who turns him over to the Joker. Even though I feel sorry for Robin and the pain he has gone through, I feel I must dial the KILL number many times, exhausting my resources, until Robin is dead. I'm not satanic (it's funny that the last three digits of the KILL number were 666), but in spite of DC, I want to see if you'll really do it. Without bringing another Robin into the comic. Without a dream sequence, even though I don't think you guys are that cheesy.

John Britt
7350 SW 154th Terrace
Miami, FL 33157

*****

Dear Denny and Company,

First things first. I like the new BATMAN logo and hope you keep it after this series is over.

I was one of those who voted to kill off Robin. I feel it's the right move to take for the series. The Joker has always been the best of the Bat-villains. His recent handling has improved the character even more.

Everything's been said that can be said about Jim Aparo—he IS the best artist for Batman. And Starlin's use of the first-person technique is an unusual one.

I'll be following the Batman (with or without Robin) a lot closer from now on.

Jerry Wilson
Lincoln, NE

*****

Gentlemen of the Bat,

"My dream is about to be answered?" For years I have fantasized (along with Frank Miller) about the demise of the Boy Blunder, and to quote from Frank's awesome work, "this would be a good death."

Indeed, this would be a great death to follow up the (only recently developed) great characterization of Jason Robin. Kill him off before he stagnates again. But if he has so recently become a great character, is it too soon to write him off? Six short months ago I hated him and would have pulled the trigger myself. Now, due to recent appearances in BATMAN and THE CULT, I respect him. So, how do I choose?

Being totally logical I would kill him, since the ensuing storyline would be awesome! Batman and the Joker in all-out war, and Bruce Wayne in pieces.

Then again, save him, and there's still war due to his mother's death, and a great character may develop from a stronger Jason.

So I sit with phone in hand, not wishing the death physically, but better that than to see his character strength diminish. If only you had done this six months ago.

With all due respect for this great story,

Marc Dubé
Calgary, Alberta

P.S. Just a last thought—By the time your poll is added up and figured out, you will already have gone to press, right? Therefore, my guess is that #428 shows Robin dead, #429 shows him alive, and the next ish will continue according to the poll's compilation. Close?

Not really, Marc. That would be a pretty cheesy stunt, wouldn't it? Three issues between the vote and the result? No, we worked it out so that the results of your vote after #427 (be it "yea" or "nay"), appeared in living color the very next issue, #428. For a behind-the-scenes report on the voting, and some serious play-by-play action, see this month's "From the Den" by Denny, below. That's it for this month, Bat-fans. Hasta Manana!

—Dan Raspler
Assistant Editor

From the Den

Well, we were wrong. Everyone was predicting a landslide, though we disagreed about which way the landslide would fall. But when the final tally was in, only 72 votes of the 10,614 cast decided it.

I'm referring to our Great Robin Experiment, of course. On September 15 and 16, we asked readers to vote, by telephone, whether Jason Todd—Dick Grayson's successor as Robin—would survive an explosion shown in BATMAN #427. Those choosing survival were to dial one number, those choosing the opposite were to dial another. Dick Giordano predicted that Jason would come through the ordeal healthy; he felt that our readers were weary of the funerals that have jolted our little universe over the past few years and would react accordingly. I disagreed. Cynic that I am, I, and most of the rest of the DC staff, thought our audience would vote negatively if only to see if we'd dare go through with killing yet another major character. We would, if that's how the vote went. That was never in doubt. For months, I'd had two completed versions of BATMAN #428 in the cabinet, awaiting the verdict.

A very busy two-day vigil began at 10:30, on the morning of the fifteenth. That's when Dan Raspler first checked the voting by using a touch tone telephone to reach a predesignated number and then, when cued by what sounded like a computer with laryngitis and a Polish accent, to enter a five-digit code: at that point, things looked good for Jason, with 243 callers wishing him well and 199 wishing him ill. Dan continued to check every 90 minutes until 7:30 Friday evening, when he had to leave to attend a Grateful Dead show at Madison Square Garden. Meanwhile, I played celebrity, giving radio interviews and talking to reporters, and keeping other DC staffers with an interest in the project informed.

Oh, yes, in between Robin-related activities, we managed to get some editorial work done, too.

By 8:00 Thursday evening, Jason's ill-wishers had gained an edge: the count was 2104 to 2195, thumbs down.

But at 1:15 Friday afternoon, Jason's situation had gotten a bit better: his friends had registered five more calls than his enemies. The count: 3451 to 3446. I began to hope I'd been wrong. My editorial duties would be much, much simpler if we could continue the status quo, with a Robin swinging through Gotham alongside the Batman.

Marifran arrived at 5:00 to help with the last-minute chores. I ordered turkey sandwiches and fruit platters from the deli downstairs; clearly, none of us would get a proper dinner that night.

I thought: *This is weird. Jason Todd isn't real. He's something some writers and artists made up a few years ago. Yet we're behaving like the family of accident victims in a hospital waiting room. At times like this, the line between fantasy and reality is very blurred indeed.*

Dan made his final check Friday at 7:30, and it was bad news for Jason: 5081 for, 5148 against. But with 30 minutes left, and a margin of a mere 67 votes, there was still hope for the kid. And at 7:45, it looked like he might make it, with 5,221 for him, and 5,259 against. Only 38 calls' difference.

There must have been a last-minute surge of Jason-haters. When, at 8:30, I finally spoke to a human being instead of that semi-articulate computer, the final count was 5,271 to 5,343. Rest in peace, Jason Todd.

Nobody real had died. But still, Marifran and I decided to walk downtown instead of taking the subway.

Several times during the vigil, I was asked, "Why are you doing this?" I had a couple of answers. First, this "telephone stunt," as we called it, was simply an extension of our policy of reading all the mail we receive and talking to fans at conventions and stores; we've always been sensitive to our audience's wishes. Second—and this I really relish—we did it because nobody had ever done it before. That's always an excellent reason to do something. You never know what will happen until you try.

Okay, what *did* happen? The most obvious result is that the Batman storyline will be changed. For the foreseeable future, he'll be what he began as 50 years ago, a fearsome loner. We're a bit worried about that: since 1940, Robin has been an integral part of the Batman mythos. He is, arguably, one of the reasons for Batman's half-century popularity. I'd like to think Robin's absence constitutes a challenge, a figurative slap in the face, and we'll become excited and stimulated and creative as we deal with it. Another result of the telephone stunt is that we may do it again sometime, if we get an idea that seems suitable for it or if readers deluge us with requests for some sort of repeat performance. We now know it can work, and that fact gives us a new tool.

So the Great Robin Experiment, the telephone stunt, was a surprise and a success. We'll rest on our laurels for a minute or two and then get busy with whatever comes next.

DENNY